



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 7**

11201 Renner Boulevard
Lenexa, Kansas 66219

JUL 8 2013

Andréa Martin
Environmental Protection Specialist
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue Southeast (Mail Stop 20)
Washington D.C. 20590

Dear Ms. Martin:

RE: Final Environmental Impact Statement for Chicago to Council Bluffs – Omaha, Regional Passenger Rail System Planning Study: Tier 1 Service Level, CEQ Number 20130149.

In accordance with our responsibilities under Section 309 of the Clean Water Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regions 5 and 7, have reviewed the Federal Railroad Administration's Final Environmental Impact Statement for Chicago to Council Bluffs – Omaha, Regional Passenger Rail System Planning Study: Tier 1 Service Level.

To assist the FRA in enhancing the project, the EPA provides the following comments:

1. Region 5 has expressed concern with the Wyandot area that is planned to be developed for ancillary facility and the location of a new rail-to-rail connection. This area is slated as potentially having a rail yard, passenger station, train idling area, parking, etc. In the Draft Tier 1 EIS, we asked that additional information be included in the next phase of analysis. The Final Tier 1 EIS does not provide any further details, only stating that this facility will be further analyzed in the "Chicago to Quad Cities Expansion Program Tier 2 NEPA document." This NEPA document was not mentioned in the Chicago to Omaha Draft Tier 1 EIS that was submitted. Since, the Chicago to Quad Cities project is part of the Chicago to Omaha rail line project, why is it going to be analyzed in a different, never before referenced document? We also ask that these environmental and health concerns relevant to the Wyandot area be addressed for both direct and indirect impacts.
2. Union Station in Chicago, Illinois is a major hub for existing Metra commuter rail and Amtrak services, and is proposed to be the hub for many new high speed rail services. This Final Tier 1 EIS does not discuss the cumulative effects on Union Station from multiple new rail services. Currently, there are plans for high-speed rail lines from Chicago Union Station to Detroit, St. Louis, and Minneapolis, in addition to Omaha. Cumulative analysis of environmental and health impacts within and around Union Station will need to be considered, as well as the impact that the additional routes, passengers, traffic and usage will have on Union Stations Metra daily commuters and Amtrak services. Impacts to train operations, train storage, platform capacity and Amtrak support services all need to be analyzed in Tier 2. Union Station is already congested handling the current capacity of passengers and trains. Tier 2 should discuss how Union Station will accommodate expanded future use.



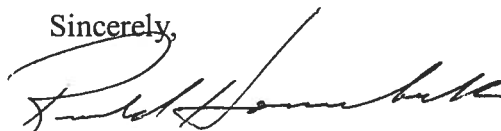
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3. EPS'S previous comments on the Draft Tier 1 EIS pertaining to Right of Way were not addressed. "Coarse and Fine level screening occurred within corridors that were 500 foot wide and 100 foot wide (plus a buffer of 25-50 feet), respectively (ES. 3.2.1, ES. 3.2.2.2). However the table of impacts (ES-1) does not clearly indicate at what scale the potential impacts are accounted. EPA recommends that the Tier 2 EIS more clearly describe the study envelopes of: existing Right of Way, Right of Way (plus any additional included study area) for the fine screening, and the 500 foot study area in the coarse screening.
4. The document states that high speed rail will decrease the amount of air pollution as compared to air travel. The Final Tier 1 EIS does not substantiate this statement by including any data or data analysis. EPA recommends the inclusion of such data and/or a summarization of data comparing the two modes of travel and their impacts to air quality in future documents.
5. Furthermore, with the increased spending in infrastructure and transportation, EPA suggests working with Department of Energy to determine if projects can be combined to provide common corridors for high speed rail and electric transmission. Several large projects are already underway to build solar, wind, and hydropower plants in the Midwest and West. DOE and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Rural Development) are looking for ROW to bring this electricity to cities and rural communities. Could future rail projects combine the acquisition of land to include the right-of-way for electrical transmission lines and rail?

The Tier 1 Final EIS does not explain how the proposed Chicago to Omaha high-speed rail service will be integrated with existing Amtrak service west of Omaha, to and from California. Will trains to and from the West Coast use the existing Amtrak route to Chicago via Burlington, Iowa, or will West Coast service be routed on the proposed Chicago to Omaha high-speed rail line via Des Moines and the Quad Cities? If the latter, how will high-speed and non-high-speed train services be integrated?

Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide comments on the Tier 1 FEIS. If you have questions or require additional clarification, please contact Shanna Horvatin at 312-886-7887, or me at 913-551-7029.

Sincerely,



 Jeffery Robichaud
Deputy Director
Environmental Services Division

cc: Illinois Department of Transportation, Peoria, IL
Iowa Department of Transportation, Ames, IA
Nebraska Department of Roads, Lincoln, NE